United Nations

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1641
10 May 1994

TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General attends inauguration of new South African President; hails Nelson Mandela's achievements and appeals for international support for new democracy; to convene high-level meeting on former Yugoslavia in Paris.

+ UNHCR issues urgent appeal for $57 million to aid 860,000 refugees who have fled ethnic violence in Rwanda and Burundi.

+ Global Conference on Small Island Developing States concludes by adopting Programme of Action for sustainable development and Barbados Declaration.

+ Disarmament Commission concludes session and adopts final report; fails to achieve consensus on role of science and technology in international security, and on nuclear disarmament.

+ Commission on Crime Prevention, meeting in Vienna, calls for measures to prevent and punish acts of violence against women and children.

+ Iraq calls on Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to recommend lifting of Security Council sanctions against it; Committee members voice concern about country's treatment of minority groups.

+ International Day of Families to be observed worldwide on 15 May.

* * *

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today attended the inauguration in Pretoria of the new South African President, Nelson Mandela. Later, at a luncheon in Mr. Mandela's honour, the Secretary-General said that South Africa had regained its rightful place in the international community. He appealed to all countries to support the new democracy, and to all South Africans to uphold the principles of tolerance and reconciliation. He pledged that the United Nations would continue to work for social progress in South Africa.

(more)

For information media--not an official record

The Secretary-General praised Mr. Mandela's tireless pursuit of peace and understanding. The new President had worked long and suffered greatly to build a new non-racial society. He also praised the vision and courage of the new Deputy President, F. W. de Klerk, who had won the lasting respect of everyone who yearned for justice.

The Secretary-General later left for Paris, where he will hold talks with French officials, including President Mitterand and Prime Minister Balladur. On Thursday, he will convene a high-level meeting on the former Yugoslavia. It will be attended by Thorvald Stoltenberg and Lord Owen, Co-Chairmen of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia; Special Representative Yasushi Akashi; Marrack Goulding, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; and General Bertrand de Lapresle, Commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR).

* * *

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today issued an urgent appeal for almost $57 million to provide aid for three months to some 860,000 refugees who have fled ethnic violence in Rwanda and Burundi. The appeal focuses on refugees in Tanzania, where 250,000 Rwandese recently converged in one 24-hour period, in the largest and fastest exodus the UNHCR had ever seen. Between 400 and 1,500 refugees continue to arrive in Tanzania daily.

Relief workers have warned of a catastrophe unless food, water, shelter and sanitation services are provided to refugees in the Benaco camp in Tanzania. Children comprise half the population there, and are most vulnerable to outbreaks of dysentry, measles and cholera. There are more Rwandese refugees in Burundi, Zaire and Uganda. The UNHCR is also assisting 285,000 Burundese refugees who have returned home since the ethnic violence began in Rwanda early last month.

* * *

The first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States adopted a Programme of Action by consensus at its final meeting in Barbados on Friday. The Programme aims to promote development in such States, while preserving their unique cultural and environmental diversity. It presents a basis for action in such key areas as climate change and rising sea levels, marine, land and energy resources, tourism and science and technology.

Conference participants also adopted the "Barbados Declaration", a consensus political text which expresses their commitment to fostering sustainable development in small island States. The Declaration also reaffirms the international community's responsibility to build equitable partnerships to help those states minimize the stress on their fragile ecosystems.

(more)

Representatives from 111 States, including 14 Heads of State or Government, took part in the Global Conference. It was convened on the recommendation of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

* * *

The Disarmament Commission yesterday concluded its current session and adopted its final report, having reached an initial consensus on preliminary elements of guidelines for international arms transfers. However, the Commission failed for the fourth year in a row to achieve a consensus on the role of science and technology in the context of international security, and concluded consideration of that issue. It also failed to reach a consensus on nuclear disarmament and agreed to include that item in its 1995 agenda. The General Assembly had mandated the conclusion of both agenda items in the 1994 session.

Representatives expressed disappointment over the lack of consensus on disarmament and science and technology. Some said that an over-emphasis on and defence of detailed national positions had overshadowed the international community's common disarmament goals.

* * *

The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice has called for measures to prevent and punish acts of violence against women and children, stressing the need to counter stereotypes conducive to such violence. In a draft resolution approved in Vienna on Friday, it asked Governments to cooperate with investigations by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, as well as with the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The Commission also approved draft resolutions on organized transnational crime and money laundering.

On Thursday, the Commission decided that the issue of international traffic of minors would be discussed at the next United Nations Crime Congress. In a draft resolution on the issue, the Commission said it was aware that such trafficking was carried out by criminal organizations with transnational connections, principally in developing countries, and that newborn babies were most vulnerable. The Commission called for the preparation of a report on the sale of children, to be submitted at the next session.

The Commission approved four other drafts on: the role of criminal law in environmental protection; information management in the United Nations crime prevention programme; the development of minimum rules for the administration of criminal justice, and the succession of States to international crime control treaties.

* * *

(more)

Iraq yesterday called on the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to recommend that Security Council sanctions against it be lifted, saying that action would be in line with the Committee's basic humanitarian objectives. The Committee, which was meeting in Geneva, was considering Iraq's report on its implementation of certain provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Iraqi delegate Khalil Hamash said it was difficult to discuss economic, social and cultural rights in his country without considering the impact of the sanctions perpetuated by certain Council members since the Gulf crisis. The sanctions were an obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights, and had no legal or moral basis because Iraq had met the requirements of relevant Council resolutions.

Some Committee members expressed concern about the displacement of minority groups in Iraq, notably the Kurds and Shi'ites, and asked questions about the welfare of the country's Jews and Marsh Arabs. One member said Iraq was "a country with an internal atmosphere of fear and intimidation."

* * *

A wide range of cultural and informational activities are planned for the first observance of the International Day of Families on Sunday. The Day was designated by the General Assembly last September in a resolution launching the 1994 International Year of the Family. The Day will focus international attention on the situation of families throughout the world. National and local activities will concentrate on the major theme for the Year -- "Family: Resources and Responsibilities in a Changing World."

* *** *